



# One Year of Shared Parental Leave

May 2016



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## Executive Summary

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*Employers need an agile workforce which can respond to the changing needs of today's 24/7 society. It is important to attract, retain and promote the most talented employees, in order to maximise business performance. Fathers and partners increasingly want to play a significant role in bringing up their children, so the efficiency (and diversity) conscious employer cannot afford to miss the opportunity provided by shared parental leave (SPL).*

*Overall take up amongst fathers over the first year has not been as low as many believe. My Family Care's survey found the proportion of all men taking SPL was 1%.<sup>i</sup> Though this may sound low, if every eligible father had taken SPL, it would still only be 5% of all men.<sup>ii</sup> Research by TotalJobs found take up amongst eligible men at around 30%.<sup>iii</sup>*

*Despite the demand, our survey has found that employers still have some way to go in effectively implementing the policy, communicating it to staff and inspiring a cultural shift towards more inclusive and gender-balanced workforces. This report illustrates key trends and challenges, and provides recommendations to employers, so they can make the most of the opportunities provided by SPL.*

## Introduction

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Shared parental leave (SPL) was created to give parents a real choice over how they care for their baby, while simultaneously challenging restrictive and outdated gender roles. For the first time, fathers have a real opportunity to be involved in the early development of their child before going back to work.

It has been available to parents of babies due or children placed for adoption after the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015. Last year, we created [SPL guidance](#) for members. One year on, we were keen to find out how organisations are managing the change internally. We asked employers to participate in an anonymous survey to help us identify the trends, successes and challenges of shared parental leave. The survey asked about the offer of pay and leave, take up levels, monitoring, perceived barriers to take up, how organisations are planning to overcome the barriers and views on the proposed extension to grandparents.

We received 115 responses to the survey, which has enabled us to identify trends and common approaches to implementing change. The results of the survey will feed into our campaigning and advisory work, as well as our response to the government's forthcoming consultation on extending the leave to grandparents.

## Survey Results

### What are the barriers to take up?

The top three perceived barriers to take up are: a lack of awareness of the policy amongst staff; employees' financial constraints and employees' concern that a career break will damage their career prospects.

Perceptions differ between the sectors. Private sector respondents believe employees are mostly concerned that a career break will damage their career prospects and that financial constraints put them off taking SPL. In the public sector, more than half of respondents believe that a lack of awareness amongst staff is the biggest barrier to take up.

| Perceived barrier to take up  | Ranked |         |        | %   |         |        |
|---|--------|---------|--------|-----|---------|--------|
|   | All    | Private | Public | All | Private | Public |
|  Lack of awareness amongst employees                                       | 1      | 3       | 1      | 44% | 26%     | 54%    |
|  Employees financial constraints   | 2      | 1       | 2      | 42% | 48%     | 38%    |
|  Employee's concern that a career break will damage their career prospects | 3      | 1       | 4      | 35% | 48%     | 27%    |
|  Lack of line manager engagement in promoting or enabling SPL              | 4      | 2       | 3      | 33% | 29%     | 35%    |
|  Employees feel SPL is too complicated to pursue                           | 5      | 4       | 5      | 22% | 13%     | 23%    |

Bates Wells Braithwaite identified a correlation between employers offering enhanced pay and higher levels of take up of SPL. Based on a survey of 100 employers, they found that the 75% of all requests for SPL were in the organisations enhancing their SPL pay to match maternity pay.<sup>iv</sup>

To ensure all parents understand each option available to them, employers must match SPL pay with enhanced maternity pay, then proactively and effectively communicate their policy

company wide. However, it is equally important to create an inclusive workplace culture in which both men and women are fully supported before, during and after their leave, because both women *and* men are nervous about the impact on their career.

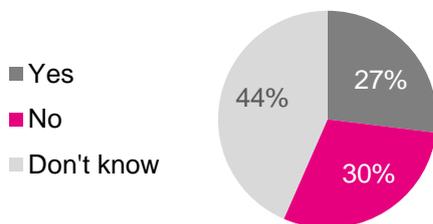


**Focusing on workplace culture is crucial, so that neither men nor women feel nervous about the impact of parenthood on their career.**

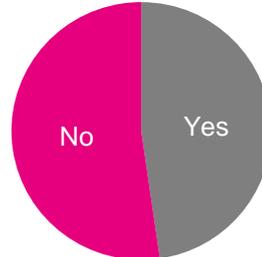
### How many employers are enhancing pay?

Our research found that there are slightly more employers who *aren't* offering enhanced pay than those who are, though the proportions for each are very similar. Similarly, Bates Wells Braithwaite found that 50% of employers had matched SPL pay to enhanced maternity pay whilst 50% hadn't.

All sectors:

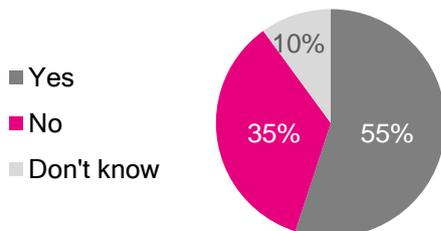


All sectors (excluding 'don't know'):

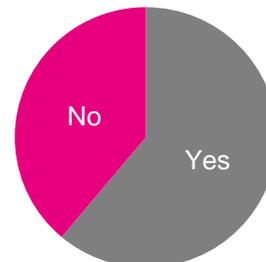


Looking at private sector only, the majority of respondents' employers offer enhanced pay.

Private sector only:



Private sector (excluding 'don't know')



Respondents who said their organisation offers enhanced pay feel more confident that their employer can support SPL for parents that request it - 96% of respondents whose organisation offers enhanced pay feel confident, compared to only 76% of those whose organisations doesn't offer enhanced pay.



**If employers are serious about encouraging take up of SPL and achieving gender equality in the workplace, they must match SPL with maternity pay.**

The majority of employers offer a choice between discontinuous and continuous leave. More than three quarters of respondents said their organisation offers both types of leave (excluding those who don't know).

## Are employers communicating their SPL policy effectively?

Only 36% of respondents said their organisation has communicated the policy to all of their employees company wide.

Respondents from private sector organisations were significantly more likely to say their employer has communicated the policy to staff and targeted groups such as line managers and team leads.

Despite internal communication, awareness of the offer amongst respondents is low:

- 44% of the respondents **don't know** whether their organisation offers enhanced pay
- 48% **don't know** whether their organisation offers discontinuous leave as an option



**Employers must proactively communicate the opportunity to raise awareness and increase take up.**

Mail-outs and newsletters should include bold headings and subject lines about SPL in order to capture the attention of parents or parents to be who may not have heard of the opportunity. Even if employees have heard about SPL, line managers and HR must be trained to be able to discuss SPL in depth and as a real option to parents.

## How well understood is the business case for enhanced pay?

The business case (financial and commercial benefits to the business) for enhancing pay is not widely recognised, but respondents were very aware of the moral case for offering enhanced pay to both fathers and mothers. In fact, when asked for the business rationale behind their organisation's decision to enhance pay, equality between women and men was the most commonly cited reason.

Many respondents stated that incentivising take up amongst fathers was the core rationale behind enhancing SPL pay. Only a small number of respondents referred to reasons such as staff loyalty, increased retention rates and a reduced risk of discrimination claims.

"We have equalised all parenting policies, so pay the same for maternity, paternity, adoption and SPL. We aim to make parenting a gender free issue and would like simplification of these policies to be universal." *Survey respondent*

"Offering entitlement for both parents is in accordance with our equality and diversity principles. The majority of "family friendly" working practices are utilised by women - this was an opportunity to do something for parents who were fathers/partners." *Survey respondent*

"The maternity leave policy is applied to shared parental leave. Therefore occupational pay that would be used for maternity can be shared between both partners. The rationale is simply fairness and equal pay across adoption, maternity and shared parental leave." *Survey respondent*



While it is essential that employees and employers understand the social and moral rationale behind shared parental leave, it is equally important to develop and communicate the business case – particularly to those with decision making power.

The business case for SPL and enhanced pay can be found in our comprehensive [SPL guidance for employers](#).

## How many employers monitor their data?

Most respondents said their employer records the number of requests for SPL, but significantly fewer said their employers are monitoring any information beyond this, such as requests by gender or type of leave requested e.g. discontinuous. Private sector respondents are much more likely to be monitoring a range of data. The table below demonstrates what data is being monitored:

| Data monitored                       | All | Private sector only |
|--------------------------------------|-----|---------------------|
| Employee requests for SPL            | 67% | 88%                 |
| The duration of SPL taken            | 51% | 60%                 |
| Requests which have been accepted    | 42% | 52%                 |
| Requests by gender                   | 36% | 48%                 |
| Type of SPL taken e.g. continuous    | 31% | 44%                 |
| Take up by department / job function | 20% | 32%                 |
| Acceptances by gender                | 24% | 32%                 |

Collecting and analysing data can highlight particular issues within the organisation:

- Understanding what **type of leave** employees want to take can help employers understand whether managers feel equipped to manage discontinuous leave
- Monitoring the levels of requests and acceptances **by department or job function** can show departments that are most effectively managing the change
- Monitoring proportions of requests for discontinuous leave compared to acceptances for **each gender** can highlight any gender bias in decision making



**We strongly recommend that employers monitor SPL data, especially requests and acceptances by gender, to ensure decision-making is free from bias.**

## What do people think about extending SPL to grandparents?

When asked about the impact that extending the sharing of leave and pay to grandparents would have, respondents provided a very mixed response.

Some respondents believe there will be a higher overall take up since more employees will be eligible, but most don't think it will have much impact at all - unless the organisation has a high proportion of grandparents, in which case take up could be higher and the change could be much more costly.

“Only a small proportion of our UK workforce are age 60 plus (4%) and given that SPL has not been widely taken up, I don't think this will have a great impact.” - *Survey respondent*

“It will make the policy even more complicated and taxing to administer. The organisation has a considerable population of older workers which would make this extension of the policy expensive.” - *Survey respondent*

“in many of the BME groups culturally the grandparents often care for children as it is seen that this is expected [...] this will also be very beneficial for single parent families as it enables the grandparent to assist without being at a detriment themselves [sic].” - *Survey respondent*

## What effect will this have on gender equality?

SPL was designed to enable more equal parenting and shift mind-sets around gender roles at home. However, many respondents feel that if SPL was extended to grandparents, it will reinforce traditional gender roles, because it will most likely be grandmothers taking on the role of childcare instead of men.

On the other hand, some respondents feel that enabling women to go back to work earlier - irrespective of who is caring for the baby - will shatter the stereotype that mothers must be the lead carer.



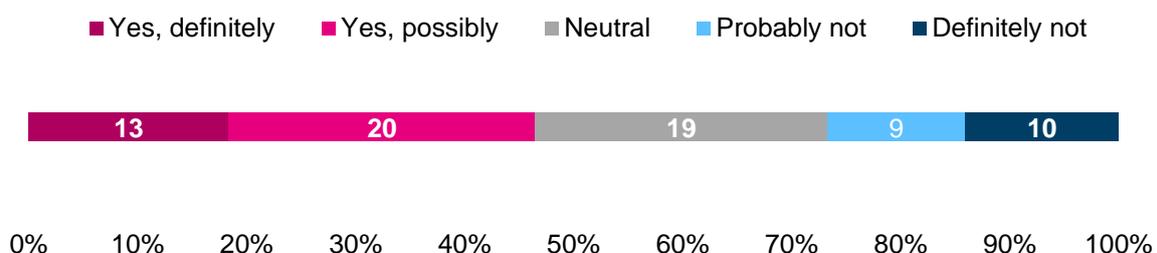
“Positive. Would permit mothers to continue in work, role modelling for the next generation. Could be especially pertinent to single parent families or where parents are higher earners than grandparents. Would enable choices based on value based criteria rather than traditional stereotypes.”  
- Survey respondent

“I think it also recognises the changing family unit - the traditional 'nuclear family' is less common these days, and family unit composition is much more flexible.” - Survey respondent

“Grandparent leave is already being referred to as 'Grandma' leave so whilst this extension will offer more choice and flexibility to working families, it could also reinforce stereotypes around female carers.” - Survey respondent

“I personally know quite a few working grandparents who already work part-time to enable them to help provide support and childcare for their grandchildren. However they are all grand-mothers, so I'm not convinced the provisions will alter issues around gender roles, but rather add a further generational level to the existing position.” - Survey respondent

When asked whether SPL should be extended to grandparents, respondents provided a very mixed response:



## Conclusion

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The biggest barriers to parents sharing their leave appear to be financial limitations, concern about their career trajectory and a lack of awareness of the opportunity. Employers can remove these barriers by matching their SPL pay with their enhanced maternity pay whilst more effectively communicating the policy to all staff. However, enhanced pay will not encourage take up if the workplace culture fails to support parents in rejecting tradition and choosing to share their leave.

Employers must train line managers on the technical aspects, the business case *and* the moral case for SPL. Shared parenting must be visibly endorsed by the most senior people and their support and encouragement communicated throughout the organisation to enable a culture which fully supports modern families.

Some employers, such as [EY](#) and [Reward Gateway](#) are streamlining all parental leave policies and pay into one distinct offer to *all* parents – both men and women. Adopting gender-neutral policies with generous pay takes employers one step closer to creating a genuinely inclusive culture, where all individuals have an equal opportunity to succeed at home and at work.

## Methodology

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The survey was developed by Business in the Community's shared parental leave working group, which includes members from the research, advisory, and communications teams. The survey included a range of open text, scale and multiple choice questions, which have enabled a rich data set of both quantitative and qualitative results.

We promoted the survey through our members, their networks and on social media. We received 115 responses to the survey. 62% were from the public sector, 35% were from the private sector and 3.5% were from the third / charity / non-profit sector.

## Sources

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<sup>i</sup> My Family Care and Women's Business Council. 2016. Shared Parental Leave – One Year On – Where Are We Now? <https://www.myfamilycare.co.uk/news/update/shared-parental-leave-where-are-we-now.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03r0gzg>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.personneltoday.com/hr/shared-parental-leave-take-30/>

<sup>iv</sup> Bates Wells Braithwaite. 2016. Shared Parental Leave Survey 2016 <http://www.bwbllp.com/file/bwb-spl-survey-2016-pdf>